

THE WORTH OF FAME

BY SALLIE M. BRYAN.

Singing one twilight to her dreaming child
Low lullabies, and sweeter than the breeze
Sings to the roses, or the tropic seas
Sing to—the dead—when spicy airs are mild;
Yea, singing sweeter strains than these to him,
Her blue-eyed darling, in the shadows dim,
A woman sat and smiled upon his sleep.
The birds flew home, the purple gloom grew deep—
Night lit her stars, and, in the dewy shade
Their miniatures, the glow-worms lay, and made
The lilies bend to look at them, when stirred
The lattice-vines, and a slow voice was heard:

"Thou lov'st that child, and I should love him too,
But were he mine, by all the nameless woe
Whose scorpion stinging I have lived to know,
I'd bear him to yon lake—and hurl him thro'
Its moon-lit waters! Start not—it would make
So calm a cradle, he could never wake;
The waves and light would cover him for aye;
The winds would rock and sing to him alway;
And—and he would not weep, nor pray to die,
Nor gaze at Heaven with a doubting eye
As some have done—but thro' the eternal years
His soul would bless thee that 'twas saved from tears
And—what I might reveal. Ha! it were crime?
Well—if it were—by all that is sublime,
Go suffer for it in another sphere—
Rather than leave thy child to suffer here!
For I do tell thee that the guilty dead
Can never find a gulf with fire as dread
As that which burns the wretch on earth!" he said.
Then like a hunted deer, and wounded, fled.
Alas, he was gone mad. * *

The years went by
And a pale youth and slight, with dreamy eye,
Stood by the lake within whose quiet breast
The maniac stranger would have had him rest
When but an infant. The poetic boy
Had built a rose-hued vessel fair and frail—
He said 'twas for some fairy's pleasure-boat—
And prisoned fire-flies in each silken sail
To light it o'er the waters. Would it float?
He asked himself in his half-childish joy—
How oft thus gladly, and thus idly, we
Stand by the still waves of the Future sea
To launch the painted barque of our desires
That bear our fire-fly hopes away—away.
Ah, what were life, but that the soul aspires
To something grand—beyond the reach of clay?
Well—ere he risked his treasure, such a sigh
Rose from among the *weep-willows* trees near by
That he could only start, and turn that way
To see a lonely man, as worn and gray
As Ruin's self, who shivered in the sun
And looked as he had wept upon the shrouds
Of the forgotten Ages.

"'Tis the One

Who, wandering, waits the coming in the clouds
Of Him he mocked upon the cross! His eye
Has seen the glories of the centuries die
And caught their twilight! and I shrink from him."
A wild voice answered, from the forest dim:
"Nay, I am not the fabled Hebrew—still
My weary soul is staggering with a curse
That seems as infinite as the universe,
And as eternal as—its God! 'Twould chill
Thy life to learn it. * * But what are thy schemes?
What distant star attracts thy soul of dreams?"

"I seek for Fame,"—"Deluded boy, beware!
Though to thy fancy, gloriously bright,
Fame is—the serpent with the rain-bow's light,
That stings to Death, or to a mad despair." * *

Beside the lake within whose quiet breast
The maniac stranger would have had him rest,
A weary man, with wildness in his eye,
Heard once again that maniac's broken sigh:

"Well—the earth echoes, Poet, with thy name;
And so, thy dreams were truth?"

"Oh, Father! Fame

Allures us up a dark and dangerous steep
Where yawn abysses desolate and deep,
Hid by the trailing flowers of splendid hues
Whose sweetness is distilled from poisoned dews,
And when we reach her bending laurel boughs,
And kneel, and bare our lined and feverish brows,
To take her blessing—she will give—a curse—

A burning, glittering, everlasting pain,
Whose changeless, hopeless agony is worse
Than God's fire-brand was to the brow of Cain!
Alas—alas—why did my mother not
Bury my childhood's sunny head beneath
These tranquil waters—ere this blasting wreath
Had turned it gray? Would I had been forgot
Where reptiles cannot sting, nor lightnings burn—
Where dust to dust may *silently* return!" * *